

Chris Powley

Ngati Whatua

1990 VAC Pat McMinn Rising Star Award, 2003 VAC Scroll of Honour, 2006 VAC Rielly Comedy Award, 2008 VAC Top Male Vocalist Award, 2022 VAC Top Group Award, 2022 VAC Benny Award.

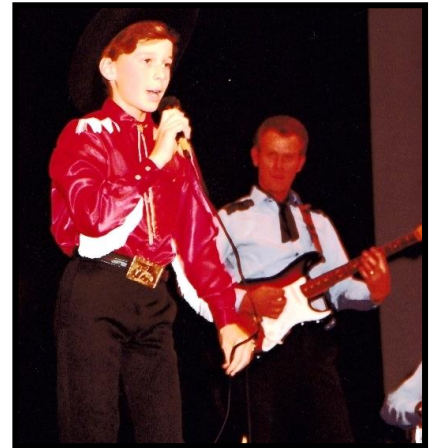


Amazingly, although the decision to grant the *Benny Award* to Chris Powley was made back in 2020, when the big moment came two years later, Chris had no idea that he was due to receive 'the big one' and had decided to get 6-year-old Wesley home to bed. He had, after all, accepted the *Ramada Hotel Top Group Award* for the *Howard Morrison Quartet Take Two* so his job was done for the night. Sadly, Howie Morrison Jr. contracted Covid the day before, but Wesley and Chris's mother Jill were able to enjoy the *VAC Awards Night* with him and his partner Robyn.

To have kept that secret for 2 years deserves a special round of applause to the *VAC Benny Award Committee*, made up of past Benny winners. Top marks to *Awards Night* producer Robyn Alexander for suggesting to Chris, in no uncertain terms, that leaving early was just not an option!

Chris left school at 15, quit his first job as produce manager at *Waiuku New World Supermarket* after 3 months and has been singing professionally ever since. Put that down to Lady Luck, good promotional skills and a beautiful voice!

Born on 26 November 1974 in the *Lincoln Maternity Hospital*, 30 minutes drive south from Christchurch, **Christopher Anton Powley** quickly found himself in Twizel, where his father Wayne was a dispatcher and truck driver at the *Tekapo A and B Dams*. Chris lived an idyllic life with his mum Jill (b. Patricia Reweti-Davis) and his older siblings Jason and Jenny. 4 years later his parents bought *Culverden Takeaways* and the family moved north.



Wayne had itchy feet; over the next 11 years Chris was educated in 11 schools. The family relocated to *Wigram Air Base* in Christchurch, where Wayne worked as a chef, then Invercargill, Dunedin Wellington and finally Clarks Beach. Here Chris attended *Waiau Pa School* then *Waiuku College* and the older Powley's found work at the *Glenbrook Steel Mill*. As might be expected, Chris found it difficult settling into his studies, always feeling like an outsider! He left school running after gaining his school certificate.

Chris's maternal grandfather, bass-baritone singer Tuhi Mareikura Reweti-Davis, is most likely where Chris inherited his voice. At age 9 Chris joined the family band *Bits and Pieces* which had mum on drums, Jason on bass, Jenny also on drums and various aunties and uncles on guitars and vocals. Wayne, as their manager and roadie, found them gigs in clubs and private functions throughout the north Island.

Chris tried guitar then took piano lessons for a while but neither felt right. His mother and siblings won several national Celtic dancing championships and Chris had had won awards from the age of 7 but ... yeah-nah! He was always singing around the house so eventually a family friend suggested that he try out for the *Franklin Country Music Club*. When 11-year-old Chris auditioned with his friend Daniel Wood they were immediately signed up. Six months later Chris won the *Junior Male* section at the *Auckland Country Music Awards*.

Here's an excerpt from Jill's scrapbook:

'He was a good baby, always happy and never much bother. As time went by we noticed that Chris loved to sing. Even though he didn't know the words, he always seemed to be right on key. By the time he was 7 or 8 he used to drive us nuts singing around the house all the time, so we thought, 'why don't we put him into something that will benefit him?' By this time we were living in Pukekohe so we contacted the *Franklin Country Music Club* and he seemed to fit in there very well. His first public appearance was in 1986 at the annual *Franklin Country Music Club Concert* in the *Pukekohe Town Hall*.'

'We contacted Lou Clauson and he took Chris under his wing and taught him the ropes. His first professional contract was three shows daily at the *Auckland Royal Easter Show*. Chris was at the *Pakuranga Shopping Centre* in January 1987, singing Maria Dallas's hit *Tumblin' Down* when Maria made an appearance on stage. He and Maria later become good friends.'



Wayne had helped as a roadie for *Lou and Simon* in the 1970s, so it was a given that eventually Chris would audition for Lou Clauson, who gave him a few tips and told him to go off and memorise some songs. Later Lou remarked, 'Several days later he was back and he had memorised and perfected everything I had suggested.' Chris toured the country with the *Lou Clauson Talent Discoveries Show* performing in shopping malls, theatres and at A & P shows.

Here's some extracts from Chris' diary:

'When I was 11, Norma Beston, Secretary of the *FCWC*, suggested that I enter the *Auckland Country Music Awards*. Mum bought me some new jeans, a shirt and new boots for the shows. I was really scared. I sang a song called *Cotton Fields* and Mum, Dad, Nana, Aunty Doris, Aunty Bella, Fred and all the other members from the club were there to support me. After I sang I sat down beside Dad and my knees were shaking so much that Dad had to hold on to them, but I still kept shaking. Finally, they announced the results; I had won the *Junior Male Award*. Everyone went wild and on Sunday we went back to receive my trophy, certificate and \$25 cash. It was neat!'

'Dad talked to Lou Clauson and one weekend we went to see him. I sang a few songs for him and he seemed to be happy and invited me to sing at his show on the 16 July at the *Penrose Tavern*. On the 13th of July I sang in a concert at the *Pukekohe Town Hall*. The show was a bit late because our compere Laurie Dee got caught up in a car accident on the way. Norma put some rouge on my face then Mum got me changed and put red sparkle on my hair. I thought it was a bit girlie but mum said that everyone used it because on stage it looks good. I was fourth on and I was worried about my throat giving out as I had been sick the week before but I got through my songs without too much hassle.'

'During the school holidays Lou, Neti, Kevin Greaves and I did 5 days at *Mangere Town Centre* and *Southmall*. It was really great. Two days later we were at Lou's *Annual Concert for Pensioners* at the *Auckland Town Hall*. There were 2,000 people there. Dad was on the sound system and when I first started singing he had the sound turned up and I nearly deafened all the old ladies. Neti sang too and this time he shook his legs like Elvis.'

In 1988 Simon Mehana offered to take Chris to compete at the *Tamworth Country Music Festival* in Australia. It was a tough decision for Wayne and Jill to make because they could not afford to travel with him, but finally they gave their blessing. Chris returned to New Zealand having won the *Best Young Talent Vocal Award* and the *Mal Gardiner Vocal Award*, not bad for a 12-year-old from the sticks!

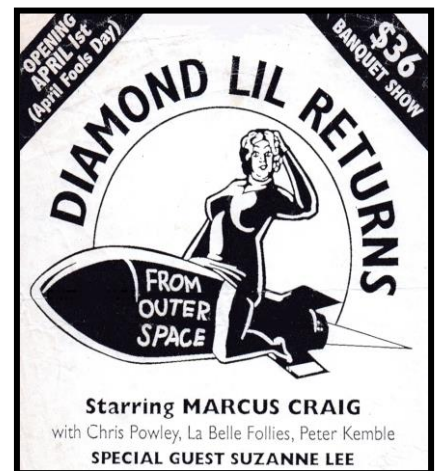


He teamed up with Amanda Joyce from the *Papakura Country Club* to compete at the *Taupo Invitation Country Awards* and the *Tokoroa Red Star Awards*. They won the *Intermediate and Overall Awards* and an invitation to compete in the national finals of the *Country Entertainer of the Year* at the *Auckland Town Hall*.

1988 also brought a visit from Marcus Craig to ask Chris's parents if he could join his *Diamond Lil Show*. More time off school, but what an experience to work with leading Auckland entertainers; Joe Dewey, Doug Aston, Sally Sadler, Valerie Rose, and Derek Metzger. Chris had major problems keeping a straight face with Doug clowning around and could only get through the routines by not looking at him. Not that Chris was mature enough to understand many of the jokes! He worked with Marcus 2 nights a week for 8 years until Marcus returned to Australia in 1994, returning in 2000 to perform *The Final Bow Show*.

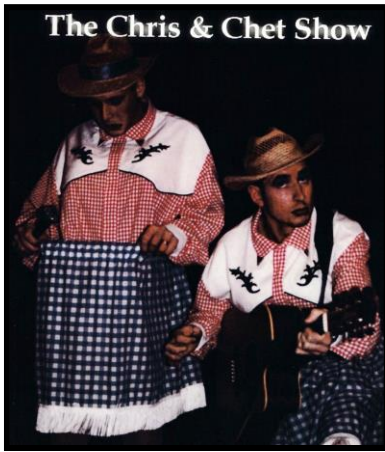
Wayne became Chris's manager and found him work singing at corporate events and concerts. Chris founded *NZ Promotions Ltd* to produce events and concerts around New Zealand, including; *Rotorua Lakeside*, *Kawerau Christmas in the Park*, Auckland's *Starlight Symphony* and Queenstown's *Winter Festival*. Chris promoted John Rowles' *If I only had Time* Tour in 2001 and emceed *Miss New Zealand* tours and countless corporate events. Over the years Chris got to meet and work with many well-known Kiwi entertainers including Dalvanus Prime, Maria Dallas, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Sir John Rowles and Sir Howard Morrison.

In 1991 he produced the *Chris Powley Variety Show* at the *Auckland Town Hall* with the late Delvanus Prime and *Patea Maori Club*, Amanda Joyce, Dennis Marsh, Wendy McMillan and the *Good Company Band*. The next year at the *Pukekohe Town Hall* he presented Robbie Ratana, *St. Stevens Maori Culture Group*, Leon Wharekura and Guy Cater.



In 1993 Chris was resident at the *Auckland Comedy Club* at the *Downtown Centre*, later home to Phil Warren's *Mrs Diamond Lil Show* with *La Belle Follies*, Sharron Skelton, Suzanne Lee, Chris and the *Ben Gilgen Band*. It ran four nights a week for three seasons. International artists Stevie Starr, Kevin Bloody Wilson and Rusty Greaves later played there. The club closed when the building was demolished.

Chris toured around the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand until he was diagnosed with cancer at age 21 and underwent surgery and chemotherapy. His friends and fellow performers supported him; Lou Clauson and Dame Thea Muldoon headed a trust and promoted benefit concerts which, along with private donations, reached beyond \$15,000 to help his treatment.



From 1996 to 2004 NZPL operated daytime entertainment in Auckland's *Sky City Casino*, producing more than 700 performances with Musical Directors Ben Gilgen and Deryn Trainer. Over the years many VAC Benny recipients performed in the show including; Ray Columbus, Chic Littlewood, Gray Bartlett, Ray Woolf, Tina Cross, Suzanne Lynch, Suzanne Prentice, Johnny Bond, Guy Cater, Marian Burns, Doug Aston, Marcus Craig, Lou & Simon, Alan Watson, Sir Howard Morrison, Gerry Merito, Shane and Tom Sharplin.

Chris teamed up with Chet O'Connell in 1996 to found the *Chris & Chet Comedy Show*, impersonating Kiwi entertainers such as the *Topp Twins*, Prince Tui Teke, Howard Morrison and Billy T James. They picked up the *VAC Rielly Comedy Award* in 2006.

From 2004 Chris performed on cruise ships until Covid cancelled all overseas travel in 2020. Chris met Howie Morrison Jnr in 2009 and after the passing of his father Sir Howard Morrison, Howie invited Chris to join the *Howard Morrison Quartet, Take Two*. The group, now comprised of Howard Jr, Chris, Russell Harrison, Jack Grace and Takerei Hikuroa-Peck, enjoyed a national tour in 2021. They received the *VAC Ramada Hotel Top Group Award* in 2022.



Chris and his partner Robyn's son Wesley (b. 2016) was the star of the *VAC Benny Awards* when he came up on stage with his father to receive the *2022 Benny Award*. Chris's daughter Adrianna (b. 1993) has two children; Braxton & Elayna.



Chris and Wesley

With Dame Malvina Major

Chris and his mother Jill